

## WASHINGTON COUNTY (UTAH). COUNTY COMMISSION <sup>[1540]</sup>

### MINUTES, 1856-ongoing

**DESCRIPTION:** These minute books record the actions of the county commission (known during the territorial period as the county court), the governing body of the county. The commission is authorized to manage all county business and county property. This includes budgeting, equipment purchasing, and auditing; use of county lands; districting for schools, roads, voting, etc.; taxing, specifically acting as an ex-officio board of equalization; business licensing; arranging for the construction of roads, public buildings, etc.; contracting for services; supervising the conduct and payment of all county personnel; providing for basic health care, public safety, and care of the indigent; canvassing election returns and appointing certain officials; and incorporating municipalities.

Following the formation of territorial government, the legislature in 1852 passed acts relating to the formation and government of counties. There were no county commissions, but the probate judge in conjunction with the county selectmen were invested "with the usual powers and jurisdiction of County Commissioners" and as such were known as the county court. The probate court clerk (also known as the county clerk) was to keep the records of the court. This structure was followed when Washington County was organized in 1856. With statehood in 1896 an actual board of county commissioners was created. The probate judge was removed, but the selectmen continued serving as commissioners until elections were held. The county clerk remained the clerk of the board, recording the minutes. The previous responsibilities were maintained and expanded.

Monitoring the fiscal health of the county was one of the commission's principal concerns during the territorial and early statehood periods. Claims submitted for the purchase of supplies and services are listed in the minutes until the late 1920s. The county court/commission levied taxes, and after 1878 also served as a board of equalization. Washington County commission minutes individually itemize equalization changes in tax

assessments into the 1970s. Some early commission minutes list taxes remitted. Minutes frequently include itemized annual budgets. They document annual May tax sales which are the county's sale of the property of individuals failing to pay taxes.

The county court created school districts and road districts, and for the first two decades of the twentieth century the commission continued to adjust boundaries, create new districts, and manage district activity. Early commissions heard regular reports from school and road districts. Road districts were particularly important. The minutes reveal that from the creation of the county through the first half of the twentieth century the Washington County commission devoted a great deal of attention to road and bridge construction and maintenance.

The Washington County Court oversaw the resources of the county, allocating timber rights, water rights, herdgounds, and mill sites. For the first two decades of the twentieth century the county commission continued to manage Washington County's cattle range. The commission coordinated grazing assessments with Kane and Iron Counties. The county court allowed bounties on varmints, created estray pounds, and regulated fencing of lands. The commission has continued to manage county land, agricultural and natural resources, and wildlife. County ordinances regulate dogs and farm animals. The county commission appoints various agricultural inspectors. An agricultural farm agent from Utah State University began working in Washington County in 1917. Wildlife conservation became particularly important in the late twentieth century. The commission created five watershed and flood control districts in 1981. In 1992 the county transplanted big horn sheep in the Pine Valley Mountains, and in 1994 the commission created the Habitat Conservation Planning Committee.

Originally the county court/commission provided for the care of the indigent, orphaned, and insane. Prior to the initiation of state welfare programs, indigents petitioned the commission for specific needs, and the commission made appropriations as they saw fit. For several years beginning in 1913, the county provided stipends for single mothers with young children. The minutes include annual lists of dependent mothers and state the amount of their stipends. In the 1930s the commission worked with Governor Blood to obtain as much federal relief as possible for Washington County residents. More recently county aid has been limited to commission-approved tax exemptions. The commission considers and acts upon individual indigent abatement requests. The commission has provided periodic assistance to Shivwits Indians living in Washington County.

County commissioners appoint or hire a number of county officials and determine salaries for county employees. The number of county officials has increased significantly over the years, and now includes a wide variety of committees, boards and service districts. A few examples are the Travel Development Board organized in 1977 and the Economic Development Board organized in 1999.

The commission grants liquor and business licenses, as well as a variety of other miscellaneous functions. They approve public building. Washington County built a courthouse in 1869, and replaced it in 1966. The first Washington County library was built in

1919. The county maintains a jail, and has operated a dump site since 1970. The commission began sponsoring county fairs in the 1950s. The commission serves as canvassers of elections, appointing election officers, setting the boundaries of voting precincts, and assigning polling places. Early commission minutes and a few more recent entries provide complete details of election results. County commissions appoint or hire a number of county officers and appropriate their salaries. The number of county officials has increased significantly over the years, and now includes a wide variety of committees, boards and service districts. County commissions approve municipal incorporations. Some municipal incorporations noted herein include: Enterprise, 1913; Santa Clara, 1914; Toquerville, 1916; LaVerkin, 1927; Hildale, 1963; Motoqua, 1984; and Veyo, 1994.

The Washington County Commission has managed communication systems, providing franchises for telegraph, telephone, television, and cable. The commission appointed and began working with a civil defense director in 1963. Civil defense efforts have focused on preparation for emergencies. These activities have been in addition to providing police and fire protection. The county commission provides services and utilities for county residents who do not live within the boundaries of incorporated municipalities. Generally, culinary water, sewer systems, street lights, flood control, etc. are provided through the organization of special service districts. The Washington County commission has organized a number of such districts, including the Bloomington Service Areas (1973), Dixie Deer Special Service District (1980), Gunlock Special Service District (1996), and the Leeds Area Special Service District (1997).

During the 1950s and 1960s the commission focused on health care. The county constructed and began operating a county hospital in 1951. A new hospital, built in 1971, was sold before the end of the decade. In 1971 the commission created the Washington County Council on Aging and thereafter began to provide services and programs for senior citizens.

During 1980s and 1990s the commission has been primarily concerned with planning development. The commission's involvement in this area began with a 1947 ordinance authorizing the planning and zoning of unincorporated land within the county. At that time the county appointed a board of adjustment, and the commission acted as the de-facto planning commission. The commission appointed a separate planning commission and adopted a comprehensive zoning ordinance in 1958. The commission began work on a county-wide master plan in 1968. Beginning in 1970 the Washington County Commission minutes include reports from the planning commission or copies of planning commission minutes with every commission meeting. The commission monitors all actions of the planning commission, including subdivision approvals and authorizing conditional use permits, etc.

**ARRANGEMENT:** Minutes are arranged chronologically by date of meeting.

**RELATED RECORDS:** Washington County Commission MINUTES INDEX, series 24570,

provides reference for some years to topics and individuals discussed or acted upon by the commission. While the minutes summarize the meetings of the commission, many other county agencies recorded the particulars. Thus the other holdings of the county commission and other Washington County agencies should be consulted. Washington County Planning Commission MINUTES are series 13751. ORDINANCES, series 13752, and RESOLUTIONS, series 24573, describe the legislative and administrative actions of the commission. Individual copies of these also appear in the commission minutes at the time of adoption or approval. A transcript of Washington County Court minutes (1856-1870) was made at the creation of Kane County. The same is part of Kane County Commission MINUTES, series 83799.

**PROCESSING NOTE:** The series was processed by A.C. Cone in July 1996. Books A through C were microfilmed by the LDS Genealogical Society in 1966, and then were transferred to the State Archives 12 January 2001. Books D through P as well as Volumes I and II were microfilmed by Utah State Archives as part of the Millennial Project in January 2003 and in June 2003 this inventory was updated to include the newly acquired volumes.

**PREFERRED CITATION:** Cite the Utah State Archives and Records Service, the creating agency name, the series title, and the series number.

#### CONTAINER LIST

| Reel | Box | Description                  | Volume              |
|------|-----|------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1    | 1   | 1856, Feb<br>23-1871, Dec 21 | Book A              |
| 1    | 2   | 1872, Mar<br>4-1878, Dec 6   | Book B              |
| 1    | 1   | 1878, Dec<br>6-1887, Sep 5   | Book C              |
| 2    | n/a | 1879, Jan<br>15-1907, Nov 29 | County Court Book C |
| 3    | n/a | 1907, Dec<br>16-1911, Sep 15 | Book D              |
| 4    | n/a | 1911, Sep<br>15-1921, May 9  | Book E              |
| 4    | n/a | 1921, Nov<br>11-1927, Sep 12 | Book F              |
| 5    | n/a | 1927, Sep<br>12-1930, Mar 18 | Book F, cont.       |
| 5    | n/a | 1930, Apr<br>16-1948, Sep 14 | Book G              |
| 5    | n/a | 1948, Sep<br>30-1961, Mar 20 | Book H              |
| 6    | n/a | 1961, Apr                    | Book H, cont.       |

| <b>Reel</b> | <b>Box</b> | <b>Description</b> | <b>Volume</b>           |
|-------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
|             |            | 10-1969, Dec 29    |                         |
| 6           | n/a        | 1970, Jan          | Book I                  |
|             |            | 12-1977, Jan 17    |                         |
| 7           | n/a        | 1977, Jan          | Book J                  |
|             |            | 24-1982, Sep 13    |                         |
| 7           | n/a        | 1982, Sep          | Book K                  |
|             |            | 20-1984, Dec 24    |                         |
| 8           | n/a        | 1985, Jan          | Book K, cont.           |
|             |            | 7-1986, Aug 4      |                         |
| 8           | n/a        | 1986, Aug          | Book L                  |
|             |            | 11-1989, Dec 18    |                         |
| 9           | n/a        | 1990, Jan          | Book M                  |
|             |            | 8-1993, Mar 29     |                         |
| 9           | n/a        | 1993, Apr          | Book N                  |
|             |            | 5-1995, Dec 18     |                         |
| 10          | n/a        | 1996, Jan          | Book N, cont.           |
|             |            | 8-1996, Sep 9      |                         |
| 10          | n/a        | 1996, Sep          | Book O                  |
|             |            | 10-1999, Jun 14    |                         |
| 10          | n/a        | 1999, Jun          | Book P                  |
|             |            | 21-2000, Dec 20    |                         |
| 11          | n/a        | 2001, Jan-Dec      | Vol. I (index included) |
| 11          | n/a        | 2002, Jan-Dec      | Vol. II                 |